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11-5-1977

President Jimmy Carter to Senator James O. Eastland, 5 November 1977

Jimmy Carter

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 5, 1977

To Senator Eastland:

It has been four months since we negotiated an agreement on the new Panama Canal treaties. At that time I wrote to you stating my belief that these treaties are fair and equitable, and essential to assure the continued effective use of the canal for American commercial and security needs.

I am writing again to reaffirm that position and to pledge my full effort to convince the American people that the agreement serves the best interests of the United States. A recent nationwide poll by CBS-*New York Times* indicates that Americans will support the treaties when they understand that



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WASHINGTON

our country has the right to defend the canal. By a margin of more than 2:1 (63% to 24%) Americans say they would support the treaties if -- the treaties provided that the United States could always send in troops to keep the canal open to ships of all nations." As you know, the Treaty of Neutrality and the recent Statement of Understanding provide the United States this right.

It is essential, therefore, that the American people be given a full, factual explanation of the new treaties. I, with members of my Administration and many distinguished Americans, will undertake this task in the coming months. I urge you to support the treaties and to help in laying



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

the facts before the public so
that this education process can
go forward as you approach
a final decision in the Senate.

I ask this of you in what
I truly believe to be our highest
national interest. I need your
help.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Carter

STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

[This statement was negotiated by President Carter and General Torrijos on October 14, and presented by Ambassador Linowitz at a White House press conference on that date. It was presented to the Panamanian people by Chief Negotiator Romulo Escobar Bethancourt at a press conference on October 18]

Under the Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal (the Neutrality Treaty), Panama and the United States have the responsibility to assure that the Panama Canal will remain open and secure to ships of all nations. The correct interpretation of this principle is that each of the two countries shall, in accordance with their respective constitutional processes, defend the Canal against any threat to the regime of neutrality, and consequently shall have the right to act against any aggression or threat directed against the Canal or against the peaceful transit of vessels through the Canal.

This does not mean, nor shall it be interpreted as, a right of intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of Panama. Any United States action will be directed at insuring that the Canal will remain open, secure, and accessible, and it shall never be directed against the territorial integrity or political independence of Panama.

The Neutrality Treaty provides that the vessels of war and auxiliary vessels of the United States and Panama will be entitled to transit the Canal expeditiously. This is intended, and it shall so be interpreted, to assure the transit of such vessels through the Canal as quickly as possible, without any impediment, with expedited treatment, and in case of need or emergency, to go to the head of the line of vessels in order to transit the Canal rapidly.

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The New York Times
CBS NEWS POLL

Support for Canal Treaties Depends on Security Provisions

"The Senate now has to debate the treaties that President Carter signed granting the control of the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama in the year 2000. Do you approve or disapprove of those treaties?"

APPROVE:
29%

No opinion
22%

DISAPPROVE:
49%

APPROVE:
63%

No
opinion
13%

DISAPPROVE:
24%

"Suppose you felt that the treaties provided that the United States could al-
ways send in troops to keep the canal open to ships of all nations. Would you
then approve of the treaties?"

The New York Times/Nov. 2, 1977

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EXTERNAL MESSENGER REQUEST*

FROM: FRANK MORSE DATE: 11/5/77EXT: 2230 ROOM NO.: 2400 TIME: _____TO: SCOTT EASTLAND DELIVER BY: ASAP *ROOM NO.: 2441 DCOB *

Received By

Delivered By

L. AlstonTIME: 11:47 A.M. DATE: 11-7-77

*See Notes Over

THE WHITE HOUSE

FROM
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Honorable James O. Eastland
2241 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.

BY SPECIAL MESSENGER